DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 362 573 TM 020 647

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TITLE Outcome Based Alternative Assessment. Project SEED.
INSTITUTION Maine Center for Educational Services.
PUB DATE Jul 93
NOTE 9p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Business Education; *Communication Skills; Creativity; Critical Thinking; Educational Assessment; Educational Technology; High Schools; *High School Students; Instructional Materials; *Job Skills; Resource Materials; Student Evaluation; *Teaching Methods; Technological Advancement
IDENTIFIERS *Alternative Assessment; *Outcome Based Education

ABSTRACT

The outcome-based alternative assessment used in a two-semester Technology Communication Skills class is described. It provides an alternative activity for final examinations and is a way for students to express creativity and exercise critical thinking skills. Participants in the class are students in grades 9 through 12 (65 in this instance). Each participant independently defines and creates a business and its documents, such as spreadsheets, job descriptions, letters, and memos. Students are evaluated on their innovations and creativity as well as their abilities to use skills that match the needs of the area's actual businesses. In the example class, approximately 5 percent of the students received a marginally passing grade or failed, in contrast with the usual 25 percent in traditional midterm testing. Resources and teaching tips are discussed. The assessment project provides flexibility and options for a broad spectrum of learners while providing entry-level job skills. (SLD)

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"OUTCOME BASED ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT"

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OUTCOME BASED ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT

The end of the year final assessment is based on skills acquired by students during two semesters of Technology Communication Skills. It provides an alternative activity for final examinations and is a way for students to express creativity and to exercise critical thinking skills.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

- **Project Participants**

Participants in "Outcome Based Alternative Assessment" include a heterogeneous group of 65 students in grades 9-12 (if keyboarding skills are introduced at a lower age level, this assessment activity could be adapted/modified for Middle School students). Each student independently defines and creates his/her chosen business, formats, word processes, and revises the copy for presentation to peers and to the teacher/facilitator.

The Technology Communications Skills classroom teacher facilitates the project and, if additional resources are needed, the students are encouraged to obtain information from the technology coordinator student lab technicians, and the business community.

- **Who Might Consider Adapting This Assessment?**

Teachers/facilitators who are looking for ways in which to present alternative assessments (in lieu of a final "exam") should consider implementing this outcome-based activity.

PROGRAM GOALS

Students will be more productive when given an activity that is meaningful to skills needed for the world beyond that of high school. The goal of "Outcome Based Alternative Assessment" is to provide the students with an understanding of skills and information needed for the business world. A positive way in which to assess understanding is to empower students to independently process and document information learned from classroom experiences.

Students are evaluated based on their innovation and creativity as well as on their ability to follow directions, to write, and to format their documents; they use skills that match the needs of the area's actual businesses.

OUTCOMES

Results of the assessment reveal that more students achieve a higher evaluation on this end-of-the year activity; approximately 5 percent of the 65 students received a marginally passing evaluation or failed. This is in contrast with traditional midterm testing, when the predominant grades are B's and C's and a 25 percent failure rate. It is important to note that this new method of assessment proves to be a more meaningful barometer of students' skills.

OBJECTIVES

Objectives include:

- Giving all students an opportunity to work independently to create their own business so that they will gain an awareness of the "real" world.
- Allowing students who have lower-level abilities or who lack confidence to have a chance to express themselves. They believe that they can complete the project and they do!

PROCEDURES AND INSTRUCTIONS

Each student defines, creates, formats, word processes, and prints:

- a scenario describing a retail business
- a spreadsheet showing products purchased for resale, their markup, the profit made, and includes a chart of some kind to visually depict the information
- a single job description to which a prospective employee would apply
- a one-page resume responding to the job description
- a database of employees, their salaries, and position held
- a letter of complaint, written in block form, from a customer on that customer's letterhead (this includes creating a business logo)
- a response letter in modified block form, on each student's company letterhead (another logo creation)
- a company's biweekly newsletter with graphics, used as a public relations tool for the company
- a formal memo to employees about an important meeting "next Friday"

- a table with tabulations, showing customer names, items purchased, and dates items were purchased
- the title page for his/her portfolio of information

It is important to note that rubrics are currently being used as assessment evaluation guidelines for projects. The rubric is created by students and teacher/facilitator and describes what quality work should look like. Available for all participating in the assessment are current and past exemplars of quality work done by students.

DURATION

For the end-of-the year activity students are allotted six 90-minute blocks in which to complete the assessment. Flexibility is built into this time frame so that lower-level students will have adequate time; accelerated students are encouraged to perform at a more advanced level.

RESOURCES

- Resources include the classroom teacher, technology coordinator, and the business community. Adaptors of this assessment should be aware that there **are** community resources available.
- The space needed for carrying out the assessment is a room which includes one computer per student, sufficient software, three or more Deskwriter or Laser printers, and paper supplies.
- Students are provided with the following range of Macintosh software to enable them to select appropriate tools for meeting the requirements of the assessment: Microsoft Works, The Writing Center (writing portion of assessment); Microsoft Excel (spreadsheets, graphs); The Writing Center, PageMaker, and MacPaint (logos, letterhead, newsletters).

TEACHING TIPS

- Create assessments that allow you to evaluate whether students know how to integrate skills and to solve problems.

- Be sensitive to the heterogeneity and diversity of the group; select a project that encourages students at different levels to perform at their highest potential.
- Let students know that learning is a team effort; the students and their teachers all need to be participants (students need to learn that teachers aren't "know-it-alls", but are guides and coaches).

CONCLUSION

The assessment project provides the broad spectrum of learners with flexibility and options. It enables students with learning disabilities to obtain immediate feedback and it helps accelerated students to work more independently and take the assignment to a more advanced level. The activity provides students with skills for an entry-level job anywhere in the country--the combination of the computer and alternative assessment in Technology Communication Skills helps students to achieve more and to feel better about their achievements--students are relaxed with the assessment because "it does not feel like a test". **IT MAKES THEIR EVERYDAY WORK IN THE CLASSROOM MORE SATISFYING AND MORE REAL.**